Todo o Nada
Montoneros Versus the Army: Urban Terrorism in Argentina

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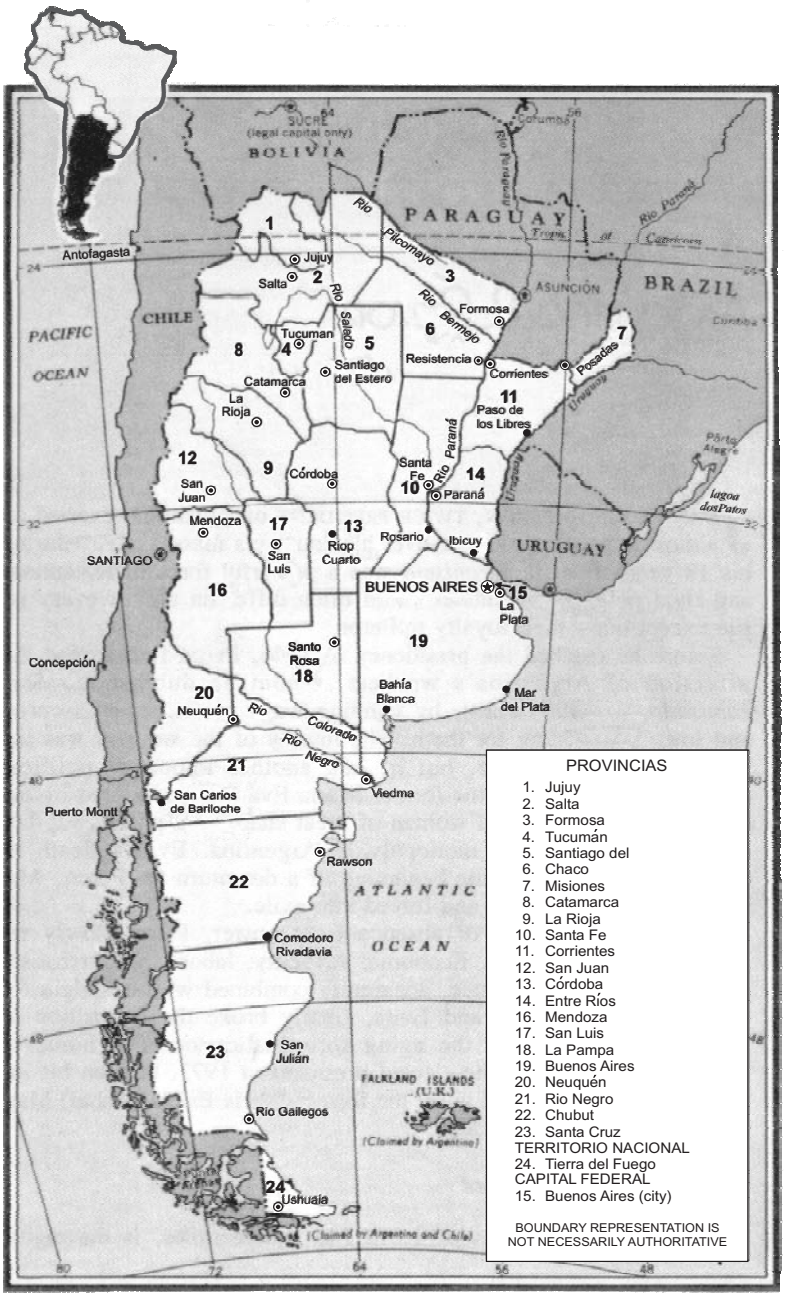
Unlike the other chapters in this anthology on urban warfare, this entry highlights the asymmetrical (an overused term currently in vogue with little clarity of meaning) nature of fighting within cities. This chapter addresses the challenges that prolonged guerrilla warfare poses within the context of an urban environment. Conventional force-on-force confrontations that characterized the nature of city fighting in Stalingrad, Manila, and Aachen are absent in this unconventional urban battlefield. This is a battlefield in which, using terror repeatedly, small cells of revolutionaries ambushed a government in the very heart of a nation—its capital city.

In general, this chapter explores how a government responded militarily to an insurgent group that undermined its legitimate political authority and threatened society overall. The specific case under examination focuses on the *Montoneros*, an insurgent group of urban guerrilla fighters who were active in Argentina from 1969 through 1977. The type of urban guerrilla warfare that the *Montoneros* practiced can be considered as being representative of other urban insurgent groups in Latin America that conducted a prolonged campaign of terror in an attempt to bring about political and social change within a nation through violent means.

In the course of examining asymmetrical or unconventional methods of warfare, another unique feature emerges that distinguishes this chapter from the rest in this anthology: the problem of terminology. Unlike conventional force-on-force operations where doctrinal terms and definitions are commonly addressed and understood through repetitive application and familiarity, unconventional warfare terminology, in many cases, lacks the clarity of precise definitions. Terms such as asymmetry, insurgents, and terrorism, to name a few, may be used commonly but often fall short of definitional agreement. Consider the case of the *Montoneros* as an example. Although they used acts of terror routinely to achieve their goals, they would never have considered themselves to be terrorists; rather, they were revolutionaries. Likewise, the Argentine military, when tasked to defeat insurgent groups, resorted to acts of terror even more atrocious than their enemies, yet they did not



PROVINCIAS

1. Jujuy
2. Salta
3. Formosa
4. Tucumán
5. Santiago del
6. Chaco
7. Misiones
8. Catamarca
9. La Rioja
10. Santa Fe
11. Corrientes
12. San Juan
13. Córdoba
14. Entre Ríos
16. Mendoza
17. San Luis
18. La Pampa
19. Buenos Aires
20. Neuquén
21. Rio Negro
22. Chubut
23. Santa Cruz

TERRITORIO NACIONAL

24. Tierra del Fuego

CAPITAL FEDERAL

15. Buenos Aires (city)

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consider themselves to be terrorists either. Numerous definitions abound regarding terrorism and what constitutes an act of terror. For this chapter, terrorism is defined as the indiscriminate "use of violence, or the threat of violence, to create a climate of fear in a given population . . . through the publicity and fear generated by their violence, they (terrorists) seek to effect political change."[1] This definition can be applied to describe the methods and techniques that both the insurgent guerrillas and the armed forces eventually used during this era in Argentine history.

Another dissimilarity to the other chapters is inherent in the nature of the conflict being examined. Revolutionary war conducted by guerrilla organizations on one side fighting government counterinsurgency operations on the other, both coupled with an element of terror, provides an example of political warfare in the extreme. As such, historians who have written about this dark period in Argentina's history have focused on the political aspects of events. Consequently, specific operational and tactical details on urban engagements between forces have not been written, have been suppressed by government authorities, or were not considered sufficiently pertinent to the historical account as political events unfolded. While detailing selected and somewhat spectacular urban tactical engagements, this chapter really examines the larger issues and consequences to military forces when confronted with a situation that the *Montonero* example provides.

In selecting an appropriate case study on urban terrorism in Latin America to examine, many potential examples exist. The most often-cited cases include the activities of numerous leftist revolutionary groups that operated in Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina; over recent years, Colombia could probably be added to the list with the emergence of narcoterrorist groups. Because the insurgent war in Colombia is still ongoing, the other potential examples provide the advantage of greater historical perspective.

Brazil, Uruguay, and Argentina possess many commonalities in that all three countries consist of democratically elected governments and most of their populations reside in cities. In the 1960s and 1970s, all three countries experienced, in their major cities, the proliferation of numerous insurgent groups that resorted to kidnappings, assassinations, raids, and bombings, all standard fare for terrorist movements bent on overthrowing the established order. Within this backdrop, the *Montoneros* were just one of many revolutionary groups of the period that used terror as a political weapon.

Using the *Montoneros* as the primary case study for this chapter has some advantages over an examination of either the Brazilian National Liberating Action (ALN) or the better-known *Tupamaros* of Uruguay. Although the ALN in Brazil operated in the large cities of Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Belo Horizonte, the movement lasted only about four years. Throughout that period, the ALN never developed the level of threat the *Tupamaros* or *Montoneros* attained and only marginally influenced Brazilian politics at the time. The *Tupamaros* of Uruguay, on the other hand, were significantly more successful than their revolutionary brethren in Brazil. They were truly the first urban insurgency in Latin America that was able to sustain its revolutionary effort. Early on they were successful in their efforts to draw adherents to their cause, executing some well-coordinated and successful terror-type operations (mostly kidnappings and robberies). They also gained minor victories in rallying popular support and in affecting Uruguayan politics. However, the *Tupamaros* started organizing almost as a conventional force by establishing fixed urban bases, supply depots, and even hospitals, all of which eventually jeopardized their mobility and security—critical tenets of guerrilla warfare. The *Tupamaros* became overly professionalized, appearing more like the military forces they were facing.[2] Additionally, as the *Tupamaros* gained some political clout, they attempted to change the system from within, through the electoral process, while simultaneously maintaining an armed terror campaign that isolated them from the urban masses they claimed to represent. The inconsistency of this policy ultimately contributed to their demise as popular support waned and the government began a program of repressive measures.

Similarly, the *Montoneros* in Buenos Aires built upon the example that the *Tupamaros* started just on the other side of the Rio de la Plata in Montevideo. Although the *Montoneros* were not the only revolutionary group active in Argentina, they lasted as a significant threat to Argentine stability for about ten years. Throughout their life span, the organization at times commanded widespread popular support and, for a while, garnered significant allegiance from trade unions within Argentina.[3] Unlike the *Tupamaros*, *Montonero* operations occurred more frequently, with attacks usually being well-coordinated and planned as well as being a bit more daring in scope and spectacular in execution. The *Montonero* example, better than other examples, illustrates how it affected a nation as it dealt with a long-term struggle in which violence on both sides tended toward escalation. Thus, the *Montoneros* in Argentina provide greater opportunities to gain insights

into unconventional urban operations (UO) and into the themes, considerations, and lessons that emerge for military forces engaged in this type of conflict.

This examination of the *Montoneros* will underscore the dissimilarities and challenges that a conventional military force faces in an unconventional (or asymmetric) UO campaign. Simply stated, in traditional force-on-force UO, conventional militaries usually fight in a somewhat linear fashion from building to building, street to street, and ultimately block to block. High casualty rates, increased lethality, and usually the destruction of the urban terrain characterize this type of combat. Conversely, guerrilla or unconventional combat operations are conducted on a smaller scale with minimal physical destruction and are usually infrequent occurrences. In fact, combat is almost absent from the landscape, emerging only as an episodic event over a broader expanse of time. As such, it becomes easy to reduce the problem to one under the purview of specialized forces—law enforcement agencies, special weapons and tactics teams, Special Forces, paramilitary, or national guards. In truth, this type of warfare encompasses the participation of all armed government organizations, including conventional forces, that can and do play a significant role.

Although the focus of this chapter is to address the military challenges to an urban terrorist threat, some general background on the nature of revolutionary guerrilla groups in Latin America is necessary to appreciate and understand *Montonero* motivations, methods, actions, and goals. While this background is essential to understanding insurgent groups of the period, it also will explain why these movements gravitated to the cities and became urban terrorist groups. This chapter will not explain the convoluted and confusing politics that characterize perceptions of Latin America or Argentina, but some political context is essential to help understand *Montonero* successes and failures. Politics and revolutionary ideology cannot be avoided due to the nature of this type of warfare. They are the "tangible" aspects of the unconventional urban landscape, just as brick and mortar are for conventional UO fighting. Insurgent guerrilla groups, by definition, conduct political and ideological warfare more than they pose a significant military threat, a fact that military forces tend to neglect.

When studying the course of political events in Latin American countries, probably the most important shaping influence to recognize is the role that tradition plays in Latin culture. Tradition in Latin culture changes very slowly.[4] At the risk of sounding too stereotypical, "one of the keys to understanding the Latin American mind-set is the awareness

that, both in its communities and among individuals, there exists a strong tradition of resorting to violent means in order to settle, suppress, or challenge sociopolitical conflict."[5] Historically, since insurgent and guerrilla activities overthrew Spanish colonial rule in the early nineteenth century, political change in Latin America has often been promoted through violence and subversion rather than through democracy by means of the ballot box. The Mexican Revolution, *La Violencia* in Colombia, and Argentina's *Guerra Sucia* (Dirty War) are three of the numerous chilling examples of the levels of ferocity that can be achieved in Latin America. In this respect, the insurgent guerrilla movements in Latin America of the post-World War II era did not deviate from a long tradition of foisting political change through violence.[6]

Over the last fifty years, many Latin American countries have had insurgencies for a variety of reasons. These factors include extensive political, economic, and social needs of a rapidly expanding but poor population; the government's actual or perceived ineffectiveness in meeting those needs; and the potential for organized opposition to the government and its security forces by dissatisfied segments of the citizenry in response.[7] Add to these factors a cultural proclivity for violence with a strong sense of nationalism or the alluring promises of an ideological component, and the potential for revolutionary action increases significantly.

During the Cold War, most of the insurgent organizations in Latin America shared some common characteristics. First, they were usually driven by a leftist ideology. Generally, the ideological component was Marxist-Leninist based, but rarely was it preached or practiced in its pure form. Latin leftist ideologies could include elements of Trotskyist, Maoist, Guevarist, and Castroist ideas mixed with nationalist, populist, or even fascist underpinnings. Many groups that started out waving a particular ideological banner often ended up subscribing to a different theory. An indiscriminate mixing of leftist concepts usually occurred and could result in ideological confusion and vague political agendas. Second, regardless of the political or ideological differences between insurgent groups, they all shared the common desire to overthrow the established order and replace it with a Marxist-inspired state. Third, they used violence to achieve their sociopolitical goals and were committed to armed struggle. These groups could not conceive of change without armed struggle. Political violence was seen as the way to enlighten the masses to the contradictions in the existing system and spark a popular uprising. The last common characteristic these groups

shared was their clandestine nature. They generally remained underground for their entire existence or part of it, an indication of their inability to survive as legitimate open organizations.[8]

As the Cold War progressed into the 1960s and 1970s, Latin insurgent groups started operating more and more in cities for a variety of reasons that will be discussed. For now, however, the point of departure for the transition from rural insurgency to urban begins with the revolution in Cuba in the 1950s. All Latin leftist insurgent groups harked back to the triumph of the Cuban guerrilla fighters in 1959 as their battle standard and inspiration. Fidel Castro's success provided the impetus for a revolutionary fire that spread along the mountains, jungles, countryside, and cities in Mexico, Central America, and South America in the coming years.[9] It would be hard to underestimate the impact the Cuban revolution had on these groups, not only symbolically as a model for a successful Marxist revolution in a Latin country but also in the support the Castro government would come to provide to most groups in their own revolutionary struggle. It was with the Cuban revolution that segments of the Latin American left really began to consider armed struggle as a viable means of achieving political objectives.[10]

Besides Castro, probably the most influential Latin theoretician and practitioner on conducting rural guerrilla war to emerge from the Cuban experience was Ernesto "Che" Guevara. Che, along with his French colleague, Regis Debray, worked on a version of revolutionary war modeled after the Cuban example that could be easily exported. Che and Debray based their theory on three basic assumptions. The first assumption was that popular forces could always defeat a regular army in guerrilla war. Second, the main area of operations for guerrillas would be the countryside (although with the later move to cities, insurgents considered the countryside important but not primarily important for a successful revolution). The last assumption asserted that the preexistence of these conditions was not necessary for making a successful revolution; small cells, or *focos,* of professional revolutionary cadres could either create the right conditions or simply do without them. Che's *foco* theory on revolutionary war became the philosophical touchstone for radical movements conducting insurgencies.[11]

By the mid to late 1960s, adherents of Castro and Che's brand of rural insurgency were active in many countries in the Western Hemisphere. Among the most important places were Guatemala, Colombia, Venezuela, and Peru. Additionally, Che led a direct Cuban effort to export revolution regionally in Latin America through Bolivia.

Castro and Che envisioned making Bolivia the center of another "Vietnam war" in the Americas with the ultimate goal of a continental revolution spreading from Bolivia to neighboring countries.[12]

Beginning in 1967, the Cuban hemispheric efforts received some serious setbacks, starting with Che's death in October, thus ending the grandiose plan for Bolivia. Domestically, Castro was faced with a failing Cuban economy that diverted not only his attention but also his support to external affairs. Finally, the exported rural *focos* began to falter and would fail by the end of the decade. It soon became increasingly obvious to insurgents throughout Latin America that rural Castroism had failed despite some limited short-term successes. Now several groups began to consider an alternative approach to revolutionary armed struggle with a move to urban insurgencies.[13]

Another major reason for this fundamental change in revolutionary strategy besides failures of rural movements was recognizing that most of the people in Latin America no longer resided in the countryside. By 1967, at least half of the population of every South American state, except Peru, lived in cities, with some, such as Uruguay and Argentina, registering an urban population of well over 70 percent. The shift in insurgent emphasis to cities was a logical, if not intuitively obvious, step to foment revolution. Quite simply, a revolutionary movement needing people to gain support and form an army logically should locate to where the people are. The revolutionary strategy of the 1970s would of necessity be urban and would include a relationship with the working class.[14]

Urban guerrilla warfare was hardly a new concept, and Latin revolutionaries had a number of contemporary examples from which to draw. Urban terror methods had appeared to succeed in Cyprus with the National Organization of Cypriot Fighters' (EOKA) campaign against the British in 1955 to 1959 and the *Front de Liberation Nationale* against the French in Algeria from 1954 through 1962. What was new for Latin American movements was the shift in primary emphasis from the country to cities. Urban guerrilla warfare had been employed for years as an ancillary to rural insurgency. This was primarily due to the hard-line Castroist influence in which cities played an almost insignificant role in a successful insurgency. Both Castro and Guevara firmly believed in rural guerrilla warfare, and the city, as they saw it, was the guerrilla's grave.[15]

Cities, however, would provide advantages for the insurgent that the countryside did not. Faceless dense crowds of mutual strangers populate large cities. Amid the daily rush and routine of city life, guerrillas

can pass unnoticed in a way they never could achieve fully in the countryside. Concentrations of large populations reside in areas that usually have a high concentration of buildings as well. The sea of houses that characterizes large cities provides the urban guerrilla with two of his primary concerns for survival—sanctuary and anonymity. As potential battlefields, cities also provide distinct advantages over rural landscapes. Dense concentrations of buildings make ideal areas from which to conduct close ambushes of police or other government forces that can be cut off from each other with relative ease. Intricate and intertwining roads can assist guerrilla actions by facilitating egress and dispersion after an operation. Cities also provide guerrilla fighters with advantages in the area of support. Banks can be robbed to fund insurgent organizations and operations. Food and medical supplies can be obtained with relative ease. Arms can be purchased or stolen. Intelligence can be collected quickly, and networks can be compartmented and established secretly.[16]

The nerves of the modern city provide a heavy concentration of lucrative targets for insurgent movements as well. Telecommunication facilities that are critical to governments for information dissemination and population control are potential guerrilla targets. Government ineffectiveness can be illustrated to the masses through disrupting essential services such as electric power and water plants. Foreign embassies become potential sites for terror bombing. Diplomats and business executives who live and work within the greater metropolitan areas become targets for kidnapping and assassinations. If the city happens to also be the capital, guerrilla attacks can literally threaten the seat of government.[17]

City centers are also where the media conveys information to the rest of the country and the world, providing potential instantaneous public exposure for an insurgent organization to a mass audience. This exposure can work to the guerrilla's advantage by highlighting the perceived impotence of government authorities and bureaucracy in maintaining control and solving social problems. The underlying assumption insurgent leaders made as they shifted their operations to cities was the belief that society and the government could best be paralyzed using guerrilla action in main population and commerce centers.[18]

Despite all the advantages that cities promise for guerrilla forces, there are some disadvantages to operating in cities. The factors of time and space can work against guerrilla organizations. In the countryside, the authorities are more distant and require a greater response time.

Government control of rural areas not only consumes time but also requires more troops covering areas that extend for tens or hundreds of miles. Large urban areas are usually the locus of the national police apparatus as well as the ruling regime's military might. As such, government response times to attacks or intelligence tips can be measured in minutes and are usually limited to just a few miles.[19]

Regardless of the advantages or disadvantages that cities provide to the insurgent fighter, a general analysis of urban guerrilla warfare shows that it is not significantly different in application than rural guerrilla warfare. The same broad requirements for popular support, recruitment, security, intelligence, and materiel hold true for any insurgency, regardless of the physical setting. The methods and techniques of fighting in cities require adjustments to the new urban environment.

As guerrilla organizations shifted their main efforts to metropolitan areas, revolutionary leaders published guidelines internally on how to specialize in urban insurgency. Uruguayan guerrilla leader Abraham Guillén published his *Strategy of the Urban Guerrilla* in 1966. In it, he called for a continental revolution a year before Guevara's more famous message did the same. Probably the most famous and widely used document regarding urban insurgencies was Brazilian guerrilla leader Carlos Marighella's 1969 *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*. This brief communiqué, written specifically for Marighella's Brazilian fighters, became the urban guerrilla's "doctrine," covering a variety of tactics, techniques, and procedures for conducting armed revolutionary warfare within cities.[20]

Although brief in size (a mere 44 pages), the scope of the *Minimanual* is fairly comprehensive, articulating the uniqueness of the city environment in relation to that of the countryside. Because it was universally used by Latin American urban insurgent groups (including the *Montoneros*) as a "how to fight and win" manual, it is helpful to highlight a few areas of note. Marighella covered topics of critical importance for the urban guerrilla's survival and success. He provided instructions on how to organize, lead, train, conduct offensive tactical operations, obtain resources, recruit, gather intelligence, and enforce operations security. Tactics were adjusted to the peculiar nature of fighting in cities, such as the notion of remaining close to the enemy to frustrate him in applying mass or heavy firepower, thus negating his conventional tactics and weapon systems. Marighella stressed how to maintain the advantage of the initiative in cities through the elements of surprise, knowing the terrain, mobility and speed, and information. Another section addressed the qualities necessary for an urban guerrilla:

bravery, decisiveness, imagination, initiative, flexibility, and determination. These qualities compensated for inferior numbers when confronting government forces. Other passages are devoted to individual training and the skills in which all guerrillas need to be conversant as well as a section on how to conduct organized action. Additionally, the *Minimanual* listed fourteen specific offensive missions that urban guerrillas conduct, including assaults, ambushes, executions, kidnappings, raids, and terrorism—all acts of violence. Of all the missions listed in the guerrilla's repertoire, it is interesting to note that terrorism is the only activity "the revolutionary can never relinquish."[21]

It was largely the political ideology, writings, and insurgent examples provided by revolutionaries such as Che, Guillén, and Marighella that the *Montoneros* built upon to pursue their goals in Argentina. However, political theory and ideology have to be applied to be effective in a revolution. Guerrilla leaders in each country still had practical matters to consider in how best to link acts of terror to political and social revolution to the seizure of state power. Although political and social revolutions are inherently intertwined, they both require different approaches and strategies in actual execution. "The seizure of state power is itself the policy objective of political revolution, whereas it is but a means to social transformation in the case of social revolution."[22] Social revolution must rely on and encourage greater mass participation than with the mere replacement of a government administration through political revolution. Since governments and their armies do not simply disappear, they must be destroyed. This is the role of the armed segments of the insurgency—those that execute military operations. The dilemma facing guerrilla leaders was balancing and coordinating the efforts and relationship of the political and the military arms of the organization. How much emphasis should be placed on rallying the public at large for revolt? How much on implementing a military action program to employ violence in the revolutionary process? These were the practical questions insurgent leaders needed to address as they planned operations. The revolutionaries' application of violence had to be measured, clear, precise, and tied to the political aim of undermining the government by provoking repression without alienating the people in the process. Ultimately, by soliciting a repressive response through using violence, the guerrilla walks an indistinct line between garnering public sympathy and causing public opposition. The guerrilla command structure becomes a crucial factor in blending the political and social facets of insurgent warfare together to maximize both efforts while not allowing violence to become counterproductive to the cause.[23]

Overall organization and command of urban insurgent groups generally follow the pattern of small cellular networks, not unlike those that partisans and resistance fighters have used throughout history. The cell structure assists the overall guerilla organization in maintaining secrecy and operational security. This is achieved through "compartmentalization," which is essentially a matter of information as each cell acts without knowing very much about other cells' activities. Operational capabilities are distributed throughout the organization so that each cell can execute a wide range of missions and limit the amount of damage caused by losing any one cell. Likewise, individual cell members know only what is required to conduct their activities. Only a select few members know the details of any particular action, while only the central executive leadership knows the specifics of strategic planning. This practice of tactical autonomy and strategic centralism ensured that base units operated on their own initiative but within the guidelines established at the top and with special regard for the central command's priority decisions. This type of arrangement can only work effectively if all members understand the movement's politics, overall organization, and strategy.[24]

Argentina was ripe for exploitation by radical movements in the 1960s. It was during this decade that Latin America experienced a period of rapid economic modernization. Regionally, most South American countries experienced a surge in growth, expansion of capital cities, and the gradual emergence of a modern socioeconomic middle class that contributed to a sense of rising expectations by all segments of society. For most countries in South America, this process of development was uneven, causing new social, political, and economic demands on governments. A climate of friction emerged that pitted old systems against new, creating intense ideological competition. Argentina was no exception to this phenomenon as the political system's disillusionment and dissatisfaction affected a whole generation of young Argentines, with the largest concentration of the disenfranchised residing in the slums and shantytowns of Buenos Aires.[25]

Buenos Aires is not only the capital of Argentina but also the largest city and chief port. In addition to being the seat of government, the city represents approximately 70 percent of the nation's wealth. It is the hub of Argentine commerce, transportation, energy, and industry and comprises the greater part of the nation's economy. Of Argentina's 23 million inhabitants, about three-quarters are urbanites, with almost half of the population concentrated in the city and province of Buenos Aires.[26]

Radical movements of the period took advantage of the urban nature of Argentine demography not only as sources of popular support but also as an area that was ripe for exploitation. High inflation, unemployment, and a large concentration of a naturally rebellious, poor youthful population characterized conditions in Argentina. The *Montoneros* arrived on the political scene during some of the stormiest years of social conflict their country ever experienced. Within this overall context of Buenos Aires, both as an actual and symbolic source of power and potential discontent, it is not surprising that urban guerrilla warfare prospered in Argentina.[27]

The *Montoneros* were just one of many unrelated guerrilla groups that appeared in Argentina at this time. The groups that surfaced represented a wide range of political philosophies, including Nazi, Communist, and unique to Argentina, Peronist views.[28] Two of the more active and resilient movements that the *Montoneros* would periodically join forces with in operations were the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), a Communist guerrilla organization, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces, a Marxist-Leninist-Peronist movement.[29]

The *Montoneros* were a leftist Peronist faction. Peronism, named after former President Juan Domingo Perón, was a national popular movement professing anti-imperialistic and antioligarchic tenets under a banner of *socialismo nacional.* Peronism, as a matter of political reality, was often vague, contradictory, and variously defined by Perón and his supporters who found the message of ultranationalism highly emotive and generically unifying. At the time of the emergence of the *Montoneros* in the late 1960s, Perón was in the closing years of his exile in Spain, maneuvering to return to Argentina. The *Montoneros* saw in Perón a socialist leader in their own mold. The exiled Perón accepted their support and endorsed the movement's actions through published statements advocating resistance and revolutionary war. Committed to the goal of a socialist homeland, the *Montoneros* interpreted Perón's messages as providing carte blanche support to justify violent measures. The *Montoneros* set out to fuse urban guerrilla warfare with the popular struggles of the Peronist movement.[30]

Taking their name from the early nineteenth-century "wild horsemen" who supported Argentina's independence heroes in liberating Spain's colonial hold on their country, the *Montoneros* viewed themselves as the modern version of the free Argentine *gaucho,* or cowboy, liberating the country from oppressive rule. Their very motto evoked a fierce resolution of purpose—"*Todo o Nada*" (All or Nothing). Steeped in romantic symbolism, the movement's founding

members, Fernando Abal Medina, Carlos Gustavo Ramus, and Mario Eduardo Finnenich, began to prepare a program to wage armed struggle.[31]

The *Montonero* leaders thrust themselves and their organization on the Argentine political landscape in spectacular fashion by assassinating a former president. On the morning of 29 May 1970, two young men wearing army officers' uniforms presented themselves as bodyguards to Argentina's ex-president, retired Lieutenant General Pedro Aramburu. After some polite conversation accompanied by coffee, one of the guards flashed a submachine gun from under his military raincoat and announced to Aramburu, "General, come with us." The two men escorted Aramburu to a waiting vehicle, thus initiating Operation *PINDAPOY*, or the *Aramburazo* as it was more publicly called. They drove through the city on a circuitous route designed to avoid known areas of congested traffic and police checkpoints, and along the way they made several stops to change vehicles as an added security precaution.

Early in the evening hours, the kidnappers and hostage arrived at a ranch house in the country. It was at this ranch house that Aramburu was told that he had been "arrested" by a Peronist revolutionary organization and that he would be placed on trial. The trial was relatively brief with a foregone conclusion—Aramburu was found guilty of 271 crimes against Perón and the people stemming from actions he authorized as president in the mid-1950s. At dawn on 1 June, Aramburu was informed of the guilty verdict and told that he would be executed in half an hour. With a handkerchief placed over his mouth, Aramburu was positioned near a wall in the basement of the house, and the leader of the group unceremoniously fired several 9-millimeter pistol rounds into the politician's heart.[32]

Unpopular as Aramburu was for the severe government repression of the immediate post-Perón years, the abduction and execution of so prominent a leader served several political purposes. The kidnapping and sentence demonstrated the organization's use of military action to make a political and ideological statement. Aramburu's maneuvering toward a return to power, a fact that was widely known but ineffectively opposed, was destroyed with his death. The Aramburu incident also was a significant act in escalating labor unrest and revolutionary violence against the sitting administration of President Juan Carlos Ongania and contributed to that regime's downfall less than a month later.[33]

At the time that Aramburu was assassinated, the *Montoneros* numbered only twelve members, of which ten actively participated in

the operation. The careful planning and daring of the act, followed immediately by other impressive operations conducted in the aftermath of Aramburu's assassination, provided the *Montoneros* a notoriety that was out of proportion to their numbers. With this dramatic beginning, the *Montoneros* launched a program of terrorist actions that would last about ten years. During the movement's height in 1973-74, it would expand to about 7,000 revolutionaries, with up to hundreds of thousands of Argentine supporters rallying behind their banners.[34]

Regardless of how large the cadre of active revolutionaries became, the movement adhered to the urban guerrilla organizational practice of a cellular and compartmented structure for security reasons. The basic fighting unit was the military command, the *commandos,* usually named after individuals memorialized by the movement or in honor of significant events. Cross-cutting this structure were the functional subdivisions of the organization: the maintenance department, responsible for acquiring vehicles and providing logistics support to operations; a documents department, specializing in counterfeit military and police papers; a war department that planned operations; and a psychological action department that was in charge of public declarations and announcements. This structure was remarkably grandiose for a movement that numbered slightly more than twenty members by the end of 1970.[35]

Likewise, *Montonero* operational tactics were typical of the type most urban guerrilla groups conducted. As small elite bands of revolutionaries, the commandos would conduct operations consisting of—

> . . . scattered surprise attacks by quick and mobile units superior in arms and numbers at designated points but avoiding barricades in order not to attract the enemy's attention at one place. The units will then attack with the greatest part of their strength the enemy's least fortified or weakest links in the city. The struggle would be 'prolonged,' consisting of many small victories which together will render the final victory.[36]

However, victory would not be exclusively a military affair because these armed tactics were designed to work in concert with and assist in the popular political mobilization the movement hoped to instigate.

The *Montoneros* struck quickly and dispersed immediately following the *Aramburazo,* but they did not disappear. While 22,000 men were mobilized to search for Aramburu's body and the kidnappers, the *Montoneros* launched a second dramatic blow to demonstrate that they were capable of a sustained challenge to the regime. For two hours on 1

July 1970, four *Montonero* units "occupied" La Calera, a town of about 5,000 located ten miles from the capital. In a coordinated effort, about twenty-five guerrillas knocked out the town's communications equipment and simultaneously took over the local bank, police station, and town hall. During the course of the operation, about $26,000 was "liberated" from the bank, while guns and the dispatch radio were obtained from the police station. During the humiliating ordeal, the policemen were jailed and forced to sing the "Peronist March" at gunpoint.[37]

La Calera was chosen for this operation because it was near the military base that was the home of an airmobile infantry regiment. The assault was designed to illustrate that the *Montoneros* could strike with impunity and to demonstrate the government's inability to react rapidly to the takeover and protect its citizenry. Through classic guerrilla tactics of surprise and mobility, a force of twenty-five could occupy a city and make the government appear weak and incompetent in the eyes of the public, foreign investors, and international banking. To this end, the operation was a huge success, but the withdrawal went wrong. Until the raiders convoyed out of La Calera, led by an imitation police car with its siren screaming, the operation had gone without a hitch.

Trouble began for the guerrillas when a car broke down outside the city. The police caught up with the broken-down car and captured two *Montoneros*. Information almost immediately extracted from the two guerrillas, presumably through methods of torture, resulted in a dozen arrests of *Montonero* suspects and the killing of the leader of the La Calera operation, Emilio Maza, in a gun battle. *Montonero* losses were significant; apart from the death of *Comandante* Maza, the organization lost weaponry, safe houses, a contact list of 167 sympathizers, and organizational security. The police now had a better idea of the organization's molecular structure. The movement was almost wiped out as a result of further police manhunts and arrests. The few key remaining *Montoneros* went underground for several months in safe houses another Peronist guerrilla organization lent them.[38]

Meanwhile, on the national political scene, a military coup deposed President Ongania just one week after the Aramburu execution. General Roberto Marcello Levingston became the new head of state in the aftermath of the coup. When the *Montoneros* reemerged from hiding in September, acts of violence and terror escalated alarmingly. Kidnappings, assassinations, bombings, bank robberies, and raids on military posts for equipment and weapons became commonplace. The government's inability to handle the situation effectively resulted in increased popular sympathy and support for the *Montoneros*, along

with sounding the death knell for the Levingston administration after only nine and one-half months in office.[39]

In March 1971, a three-man junta led by General Alejandro Agustin Lanusse deposed Levingston in another military coup, and Lanusse replaced him. During the Lanusse regime, the *Montoneros* tempered their application of violence, not as a sign of support for Lanusse but, rather, to garner and build popular support. The *Montoneros* began to wage an effective propaganda campaign against the government. Sympathetic responses to *Montonero* activities were carefully cultivated by using extreme discrimination in selecting targets not only for their political effect but also for their symbolism, a unifying aspect to which all Peronist supporters could relate. For example, over 100 bombs went off on the twentieth anniversary of the death of Eva "Evita Montonera" Perón, destroying many foreign businesses. The public could not help but grasp the political significance of these explosions. Likewise, other targets were selected because they were symbols of the ruling class elites such as the numerous jockey clubs and luxurious country clubs throughout Buenos Aires. These bombings were executed with a sense of "revolutionary style" that also contributed to the romantic aura of the *Montoneros* as Robin Hood-type protectors of the less privileged, an image that the organization cultivated. While the clubs of the wealthy were being bombed, approach roads were closed off with signs reading "Danger! Dynamited Zone."[40]

Economic problems, which had in part contributed to the end of Levingston's term, subsequently grew worse. The Argentine peso continued to be devalued while inflation spiraled up to 70 percent in 1972. Government credit was almost nonexistent, and Argentina faced one of the most serious economic crises of the century. By helping to create a climate of insecurity and social disorder during this period of economic emergency, *Montonero* guerrilla activity was a behind-the-scenes factor in other semi-insurrectional challenges that shook the government such as strikes, demonstrations, and antigovernment rallies. After nearly seven years of control, many military leaders were tired of trying to solve Argentina's political and economic mess. They were willing to turn the country's problems back to civilians. The time was right for Juan Perón's return to Argentina. While awaiting Perón's arrival, the *Montoneros* did not completely abandon their armed struggle. Violent guerrilla actions continued but with less frequency, mostly to indicate to the generals what they could expect if the scheduled 1973 elections were canceled. For the most part, however, the *Montoneros* redirected their energies toward mass political activity surrounding the Perón

return and then in winning the general election campaign. Ultimately, the *Montoneros* became a modest legitimate political force in their own right by winning a few elected seats in the Perón-dominated parliament.[41]

However, briefly stated, the time that Perón was in power was just as tumultuous for Argentina as the preceding years had been. It did not see an end to guerrilla activity or acts of terror. The honeymoon period between Perón and the Peronist left was a brief one, shattered as an ideological gulf appeared between the *Montoneros* and *el Lider.* As a politician, Perón looked more to compromise as the means to deal with all political factions in an attempt to get Argentina back to solvency and stability. Whereas Perón emphasized class alliance, the *Montoneros* still advocated class struggle as the answer to the problems that beset society. In poor health, less aggressive, and content with his vindication by the Argentine electorate, Perón was not inclined to promote any dramatic social changes. Faced with mounting labor unrest; commodity shortages, including food staples; and economic strife, Perón antagonized the left with his conciliatory approaches. The *Montoneros* became more and more critical of the government and lost their naiveté concerning Perón, especially after he denounced the more violent aspects of the left. In response, the radical left initiated a new wave of terrorist attacks in Argentina's main urban centers. Collectively, the various movements conducted over 500 kidnappings that netted ransoms in excess of $50 million in 1973. Assassinations began anew as well but focused principally on the split between right-wing and left-wing Peronists.[42]

With Perón's death in July 1974, the situation in Argentina grew worse. Perón had named his second wife, Isabel, as his running mate in the 1973 election, and she inherited the presidency with Perón's passing. A former nightclub actress with only six years of formal schooling, Isabel's background and education poorly equipped her to be vice president, much less president. Within two weeks of Isabel taking office, the cities were swept again with a surge in violence. Assassinations reportedly averaged one every nineteen hours. In partial response to the rampant lawlessness, the unofficial, yet government-sanctioned, infamous "Triple A" (Argentine Anticommunist Alliance) death squads started cracking down on leftist movements.[43]

By September 1974, the *Montoneros* were underground and declared a "total popular war" on a government deemed "neither popular nor Peronist." In November, Isabel formally declared Argentina to be in a state of siege, and the government imposed a "temporary" suspen-

sion of constitutional rights that remained in place for six years. In December, she petitioned congress for broad powers to call up the military to combat subversion and assist in maintaining security. For the first time since the military withdrew from power, the army was authorized to join the police to fight against the guerrillas. They launched an all-out offensive against the ERP in mid-February 1975. Meanwhile, in retribution, guerrillas staged some devastating attacks in or on the outlying areas of Argentina's largest cities, targeting army and navy installations, airports, and federal prisons. All told, by the end of 1975, over 1,700 people from all walks of life were reported to have been killed as a result of political violence during the eighteen months Isabel was president.[44]

The *Montoneros*' return to clandestine activity was intended as a defensive measure in response to an enemy offensive involving the Triple A, police forces, and the military. Once the *Montoneros* could successfully survive mounting offensive pressure, they looked to regroup and conduct a counteroffensive. The primary objective of the counteroffensive would be to "exhaust," not "annihilate," the enemy forces because they could never hope to match the combined strength of the government security forces. During the rebuilding phase, the *Montoneros* relied on the biggest advantage the cities afforded to the movement—the urban population. Thousands of activists and supporters joined the *Montonero* ranks in reaction to the government's repressive actions.

With this groundswell of support, the leadership attempted to build a *Montonero* army. A new organizational structure, along with a division of functions, took place. Unlike the previous years, in which units were trained in both political and military action, specialization became the order of the day, with political and military functions segregated. Additionally, combat platoons (*pelotones de combate*) replaced the old commandos as the basic operational cell. The new "platoons" were subordinate divisions of a far more elaborate military "column" structure. Military ranks were assigned to the members of the organization as well. Accompanying this reorganization was a vast expansion of the movement's infrastructure. Logistics bases, "safe houses," assembly areas, printing equipment, "people's prisons," training facilities, and munitions workshops were all formally established and organized. By 1974, these new changes enabled the *Montoneros* to mobilize 1,500 people nationally and conduct about 100 *operaciones* such as Molotov cocktail attacks on targets of repressive affiliation, distributing leaflets, raids, occupations, and mass demonstrations in any city they desired.

During their peak year of 1975, the *Montoneros* were able to organize the support of up to 5,000 revolutionaries for various actions, if needed.[45]

Building a genuine guerrilla army required an abundant supply of weapons and equipment. The *Montoneros* focused their efforts on obtaining the necessary funds to equip and train their army. Kidnapping for ransom seemed like the best way for the *Montonero* leaders to acquire funds quickly on the scale required to underwrite their expansion and future operations. Chief executives of the international corporation of *Bunge y Born* were selected as targets. Juan and Jorge Born were the director and general manager, respectively, of this business empire. As the Born brothers rode in their chauffeured limousine from their home in the plush Buenos Aires suburb of Beccar on 19 September 1974, *Montonero* operatives followed them. At one point, the limousine was directed to detour from the main road by "policemen." Once off the main road, about twenty to thirty "telephone repairmen" ambushed the occupants of the car. With the chauffeur dead, the Born brothers were whisked away to stand "trial" for acts against the workers, the people, and national interests. Subsequently convicted of their crimes, the brothers were sentenced to one year's imprisonment in a "people's prison." The *Montoneros*, in a communiqué, announced that they would release the "criminals" if their demands were met. The demand, a ransom of $60 million, was a world-record sum. Described as "bail," it was for the release of Juan and Jorge.[46]

Negotiations with *Bunge y Born* representatives became prolonged as the company balked at paying such a large sum. To expedite payment, the guerrillas applied additional pressure to the business conglomerate by kidnapping another executive, later ransomed for half a million dollars, and through intimidating other high-ranking partners with numerous death threats. The pressure worked, and the company finally gave in to the guerrillas' demands nine months after the kidnapping.[47]

The successful *Bunge y Born* operation not only provided the *Montoneros* with a sizable financial base that exceeded one-third of the national defense budget but also demonstrated the viability and strength of their organization. Several months later, the *Montoneros* followed the success of the Born brothers' operation with the kidnapping of a Mercedes Benz executive that added another $5 million ransom to the insurgency's coffers. With the payoffs from these kidnappings and other operations totaling more than $70 million, the *Montoneros* were guaranteed financial independence to purchase any-

thing the organization required. All this occurred at a time when the Argentine economy faced its worst financial crisis since the 1930s. Inflation hit an annual rate of 200 percent, and unemployment reached unprecedented levels. A former economic minister characterized the condition as "the total destruction of its (national) economic order."[48]

Financially secure, better armed, and more numerous, the *Montoneros* became ever more ambitious in operations against the government and its armed forces. Vengeance killings now became a staple of *Montonero* justice. On top of the list was Federal Police Chief Alberto Villar who had ties to the dreaded Triple A. Villar and his wife were killed as they launched their small yacht from the Tigre boat dock, a recreational harbor up river from Buenos Aires. A powerful bomb had been placed underneath the yacht's floorboards near the engine. As the craft began to maneuver from its mooring, the heat from the engine triggered the explosives and blew the boat apart. Three other former federal police chiefs were killed shortly thereafter, along with other government officials who either collaborated with or were part of the Triple A "death squads." Violence for the sake of violence became the order of the day as *Montonero*-conducted assassinations continued almost indiscriminately.[49]

This move to indiscriminate killing motivated by hate, revenge, and a desire for blood ironically proved to contribute to the demise of the *Montoneros* just at the time when they were the strongest militarily. This surge in killing public officials, for the most part, was not met with public outrage because many of the targets themselves were unpopular, but there were just as many other killings whose significance was lost on the general public. Public support and legitimacy as a "people's movement," critical components for a revolutionary army's survival, began to wane as violence became divorced from political ends that the public could understand. Everyone who worked for the government or wore a police uniform became the enemy.[50]

The killing could partly be attributed to the increasing tendency toward regular military warfare and a more conventional military approach to achieving objectives through killing the enemy. The *Montoneros* fell into the same trap of overprofessionalization that hurt the *Tupamaros* in Uruguay. In one sense, the *Montoneros* became more "symmetrical" in relation to the forces they faced. This move toward greater militarism drew the movement into what they called the dialectic of confrontation—"a reactive spiral of violence which tempted *Montoneros* to increasingly respond to enemy moves rather than seize and retain the initiative."[51]

Besides the campaign against the state security apparatus previously mentioned and the propaganda efforts, the guerrillas launched two other tactical military offensive campaigns in the period 1974-1976. The first saw the initiation of genuine military and paramilitary activity with major attacks primarily directed against the armed forces. The last campaign, set in motion in 1976 on the eve of yet another coup, was principally aimed against the police forces. In both campaigns, the guerrillas selected targets in and around major urban areas to illustrate to the public the government's impotence in securing its own installations. The campaign against the military is the more noteworthy because it saw occasions where the *Montoneros* rampaged at will through Argentina's major cities and dealt significant blows to all three traditional military services: the army, navy, and air force.[52]

This campaign started in July 1975 and at first involved blocking roads, temporarily occupying the city of Córdoba (twice) through superbly synchronized raids, and attacking police stations. In addition to the two attacks on Córdoba and a similar attack in Buenos Aires, nine police stations, twenty stores, two press offices, three town halls, and an artillery headquarters were bombed. What the *Montoneros* achieved by these actions was to show that the police alone could not maintain order despite introducing sand-bagged machine gun nests and strictly controlling traffic around police stations and other likely targets. Police casualties began mounting at least as rapidly as *Montonero* losses, thereby prompting the army to demand the lead in the national counterinsurgency effort.[53]

The army no longer limited its intervention against urban insurgent groups to the times when the police seemed overwhelmed. The shift to a military lead in this war signaled that matters of stability and order were no longer primarily police matters. From the moment the army took control of the counterinsurgency effort, the *Montoneros* considered every uniformed man a representative of repressive institutions and thus a potential terrorist target. The *Montoneros* next lashed out against the military with great ferocity.[54]

Well-coordinated guerrilla operations illustrating a high degree of technical planning and proficiency characterized the latter months of 1975. During this time, the *Montoneros* launched some of the largest guerrilla operations ever undertaken in Argentina. The campaign began when 100 *Montonero* bombs exploded throughout Argentine cities on key revolutionary anniversary dates in August and September, almost as the herald of a new phase in an armed struggle. After this opening salvo of terror bombing, the campaign against the armed forces com-

menced with attacks on all three armed forces. These guerrilla operations were designed to administer serious psychological blows to the military's public image, if not a clear military defeat for government counterinsurgency efforts.[55]

First, the navy was hit in a well-orchestrated attack. The *Montoneros* blew up the navy's prize possession, a newly acquired, and their first, modern missile-carrying frigate, the 3,500-ton *Santisima Trinidad.* A *Montonero* unit that studied underwater attacks from World War II meticulously planned this operation. Approaching at night in a collapsible camouflaged boat, *Montonero* frogmen attached underwater demolition charges to the ship's hull as it was lying in a naval shipyard protected by guards. Although the resulting explosion did not sink the ship, it did knock out all the electronics aboard, setting operational deployment back by at least a year.[56]

The *Montoneros* then attacked the air force. This attack occurred at an airport in the city of San Miguel de Tucuman. This operation, like the one on the navy, also occurred in a guarded military zone, but the *Montoneros* took advantage of slack security practices. A *Montonero* platoon found an abandoned tunnel that ran under the runway at the airport and packed explosives in a drainage pipe that ran perpendicular from the tunnel and up to the runway. As a C-130 military transport plane rolled down the runway for takeoff, the explosives were detonated by remote control as the aircraft rolled over the drain's location. The explosion damaged the runway and destroyed the C-130. The plane exploded with a military antiguerrilla unit on board. Five people were killed and forty injured in this well-timed and planned operation.[57]

The operation that had the honor of being the most elaborately planned and audacious in scope was reserved for the army. It was early October 1975 when the *Montoneros* attacked the garrison of the 29th Regiment, Mounted Infantry (R29) in the Argentine city of Formosa, located 930 kilometers north of Buenos Aires and close to the Paraguayan border. This northern provincial capital was not a *Montonero* stronghold, so consequently, combatants and equipment had to be transported from a *Montonero* base in Rosario about 800 kilometers away. A total of sixty members composed the whole force, made up of thirty-nine fighters in the assault element and twenty-one support personnel pre-positioned in Buenos Aires, Santa Fe, and Formosa. Success depended on the synchronization of three separate actions, the first being hijacking an *Aerolineas Argentinas* Boeing 739 en route from Buenos Aires to Corrientas. This task was entrusted to

four guerrillas, including some doctors among the hijackers, who were to force the pilot to land at the Formosa airport instead of its planned destination. Next, nine guerrillas would take over the airport as the plane was circling overhead. The third action, a convoy of six vehicles consisting of twenty-six people (some in army uniforms), attempted to head undetected to the R29 garrison to conduct the attack and demand the post's surrender.

The assault element achieved some initial success in approaching the garrison undetected. This success can be attributed to the fact that the military was not expecting an attack so far from Buenos Aires. Additionally, the approaching convoy appeared routine to the camp's guards, and the guerrillas dressed in army uniforms were quite literally "hiding in plain sight." The garrison personnel only began to react once the guerrillas approached near the compound gate and fired their weapons. Once firing began, the assault element started taking heavy machine gun fire from various guard towers. The guerrilla force was only able to penetrate the R29 garrison as far as the camp armory where they took some weapons, including a machine gun, that was put to immediate use. The battle that ensued was brief but furious. The *Montoneros* took high casualties, and five of the six vehicles were immobilized. As army reinforcements began to arrive from nearby residential quarters, eleven surviving guerrillas piled into the only remaining vehicle, an F-350 truck. There was just enough room in the truck for the attackers with their weapons to make a getaway. Another four guerrillas ultimately reached the airport independently. Once at the airport, the surviving fighters took off in the Boeing and a four-seater Cessna 182. The wounded were provided with blood transfusions while in flight. The hijackers forced the pilot of the Boeing to land in a field outside Santa Fe where other guerrillas with ten vehicles awaited their arrival. The guerrillas then vanished, preventing police pursuit by simply scattering nails on the roads behind them.[58]

It is interesting to note that the attack on the infantry regiment in Formosa was probably the *Montoneros*' most important "military" operation, but it was also their last.[59] It was these spectacular operations against the armed forces that, in part, contributed to the military reasserting control over the Argentine government. After the attack on the R29 base, the army demanded a larger role in dealing with subversive threats to the military, society, and the nation overall. The army pressured the government to approve its proposal for a National Council of Internal Security and a National Defense Council. The internal security council served essentially as a rubber-stamp organization for all

antisubversive actions deemed appropriate by the military; the defense council would enforce the internal security council's policies. Military repression was now given official sanction and would be carried out against all organizations in which subversion was believed to exist. These included known rural and urban guerrilla organizations, combative trade unions, "factory guerrillas," and university student groups. To assist the military in this effort, the two councils gave the armed forces the power to coordinate and centralize all of the nation's agencies, including control over the federal police who could assist in repressing anyone deemed subversive.[60]

Also, by late 1975 and into 1976, economic reverses continued; the rate of inflation reached 350 percent, and the prolonged internal warfare brought Argentina to virtual anarchy. President Isabel Perón was ineffective in bringing any economic or political stability to the national situation. Furthermore, when she was accused of mismanagement and corrupt practices, she was forced to relinquish her position as head of state. The military, its position already strengthened politically by its increased role under the charter of martial law as the central agency controlling antisubversive policies, reasserted itself into the government leadership role. General Jorge Rafael Videla took charge in the aftermath of a military coup following Isabel's removal from office and established a military dictatorship. The army took the lead in running the government, but the navy and air force each shared a third of all governmental responsibilities in an awkward division of power.[61]

Meanwhile, the *Montoneros* continued fighting through 1976 against the police and the military, but none of their subsequent actions ever achieved the level of sophistication, scale, or drama as the ones conducted in the latter part of 1975. As the military began an extreme but effective program of eradicating insurgent groups in 1976, *Montonero* operational capacity became limited to random acts of terrorism. The press, now suppressed by the dictatorship, robbed the *Montoneros* of their last true political weapon—media publicity. Popular support to the movement all but evaporated as the public grew weary from all the civil strife, and the government's reign of terror, the "Dirty War," began. Instead of flocking to their ranks in the face of unbearable repressive conditions as the *Montoneros* hoped, many potential recruits came to regard guerrilla groups as being solely responsible for the repression that occurred nationwide, mostly in the cities but in the countryside as well. By 1977, the *Montoneros* were virtually decimated as a fighting force due to the military's antisubversive measures. Armed resistance came to a complete halt in 1979 when an exiled group of

guerrillas returned to conduct a counteroffensive and was almost annihilated. Although the *Montoneros* continued as a movement into 1980, it was estimated that no more than 350 members remained. Although the *Montoneros* never acknowledged defeat, by 1980, nonviolent methods became the rule. The *Montonero* watchword became "to resist is to win," a far cry from the inspirational *todo o nada*.[62]

The military dictatorship after 1976 was no better equipped than its predecessors to deal with the vexing social and economic questions that had beset Argentina for so long. In true military fashion, the dictatorship focused on a problem it could solve—the issue of subversion and security. Officially known as the "final resolution" but more popularly known as the "Dirty War," it included Nazi techniques of mass arrests, imprisonment, unprecedented levels of torture, murder, and burial in mass graves of anyone deemed politically undesirable. No one in Argentina was safe from the parallel clandestine state the military erected in its zeal to "save" the nation. Between 1976 and 1983, upwards of 30,000 Argentines disappeared through the practices of political genocide. Ostensibly occupied with combating terrorism, the government's cure for subversion resulted in the intimidation of the entire population, with no segment of society considered safe or totally secure.[63]

In one sense, the military became what it was fighting—terrorists. What started as urban warfare between two asymmetrical forces—one revolutionary and guerrilla, the other a professional conventional military—during the course of prolonged and frustrating conflict moved toward an unanticipated stage of symmetry. The insurgents became more militarized as the professionals became more clandestine and criminal.

One of the underlying assumptions of this chapter is the notion that a study of past insurgencies or radical revolutionary movements can provide insight into similar situations faced today or in the future. At the tactical level, this brief examination of the *Montoneros* illustrates that, modern refinements notwithstanding, almost everything radical movements practice today has been used in the past. The specific methods may differ, say crashing an airplane into a skyscraper, but the tactical principles are the same. The efficacy of small mobile assault groups operating "behind the lines" to harass the enemy, attacking his symbols of national strength, and terrorizing the citizenry have not fundamentally changed over time. In this type of warfare, though, military tactics are employed and political objectives are sought.[64] Military forces need to understand this and prepare to deal with the challenges that the asymmetrical type of warfare poses. The fact that

radical movements have been inseparably linked to ideological forces hostile to the United States presents this issue in a more urgent light.

As a practical matter, militaries that operate in an unconventional urban environment need to understand that technology and weapons alone will not provide the solution to countering asymmetrical threats. Unfortunately, state-of-the-art technology also increases the power of radical movements since ideologically motivated insurgents or terrorists can either construct or secure devices or weapon systems that, for a short time, put them on a roughly equal footing with a country's constituted authority. This technological parity can be a disadvantage to a conventional force, even if its equipment or troops are numerically superior. The threat can "mass" at the critical point and time of its choosing, knowing full well that even with superior numbers the military cannot possibly be everywhere. This point becomes clearer as one considers that the *Montoneros*, although labeled as urban guerrillas, operated throughout the country in other cities, occasionally in the countryside, and as far away as a remote border garrison near the northeastern city of Formosa. They were "urban" in the sense that cities provided a base for operations, safety, funding, logistics support, and intelligence networks, but they could and did strike with impunity anywhere they chose.

Probably the greatest challenge for conventional military forces that engage in an unconventional operating environment is to understand the different nature of the "combat" situation and adjust their traditional battlefield frameworks accordingly. A template type of response to an insurgent threat over a prolonged period of time often fails. Key terrain in these types of operations becomes the symbolic and real centers of government power. One only has to look to the recent examples of the World Trade Center and Pentagon attacks to validate this point. The battleground to be won is not city sectors or districts; it is a fight for minds. This is especially true in a classic revolutionary struggle where both sides are attempting to gain the population's support. Conventional force reliance on massed firepower and maneuver is not only politically inappropriate but also, as a practical matter, very difficult to execute against guerrillas operating in congested, complex city terrain.

Military leaders and planners need to keep in mind that generally these operations involve counterinsurgency and are not necessarily combat operations. At the national level, effective government counter-insurgency programs should include both rewards and punishments. Political and economic development programs must be integrated with

military operations designed to eliminate hostile opposition to maintain a legitimate governing authority. It is also necessary to reduce the number of people seen as "the enemy" so we do not alienate public opinion or stifle legitimate dissent.[65]

Another lesson for military professionals to consider when examining the legacy of urban guerrilla warfare is that effective counterinsurgency doctrine is for both specialized forces and conventional forces. Conventional forces need to understand and train to perform counterinsurgency tasks. The potential always exists for U.S. forces assigned to a peacekeeping mission to be tasked to provide support directly to a host nation or in conjunction with a coalition to a region undergoing an insurgency. The U.S. Army found itself in this type of situation as it supported the UNISOM II mission in Somalia in the early 1990s. Understanding the role that conventional forces play in these kinds of operations can assist in maintaining peace. Conventional forces can collect essential intelligence; sweep, clear, and hold areas; and provide a rapid-reaction capability. According to scholars Georges Fauriol and Andrew Hoehn, "in the end, both insurgent and counterinsurgent activities seek one objective; the maintenance and control of political power."[66] In that regard, a military force engaged in these endeavors needs to be prepared to exercise the full range of operations: offense, defense, stability, and support.

The Argentine military response to threats to its society demonstrates an extreme example of how to provide domestic security. A larger lesson that emerges from this case study is that no exclusively military solution for urban violence exists. Urban terrorism is not peculiar to any specific form of society, and under certain conditions, terrorists can succeed in breaking down the fabric of the most resilient democratic society. The measures and level of power the Argentine military exercised may be a remote possibility in a society that has a strong democratic tradition such as in the United States. The challenge to our society, if faced with similar conditions, is to find another way to resolve threats to stability and security without resorting to the Argentine model. This makes it important to consider the problems of national response in these situations. The first requirement is that the government under attack, whether the attack is from an internal insurgent or external terrorist, must show both the resolution and the capacity to respond with necessary force. Just as important as the first requirement is the ability to show restraint in applying force when appropriate. Last, effective UO of any kind require good, timely intelligence coordinated in conjunction with all components in the fight.[67]

One other issue emerges for consideration as a result of this case study on an asymmetrical threat—a cautionary note. To evaluate the phenomenon of the *Montoneros* in Argentina merely from the standpoint of winners and losers overlooks more fundamental issues of concern for modern military professionals. It is true that the *Montoneros* lost in their goal of initiating a popular uprising and replacing the existing regime. In most instances, however, they made a deep impression well out of proportion to their numbers or the strength of their financial and logistics resources. They caused a significant amount of the nation's resources and energy to be applied to the threat they posed. Even when they were able to mount an effective operational challenge in 1975, they were still ultimately defeated by efficient, though brutal, counterinsurgency operations.[68] The tragedy in all this is that the professional military, the defender of freedom and liberty, eventually turned its energies inward, repressing the society it was supposed to protect. In that sense, the *Montoneros* affected millions of lives as democracy was destroyed in the process. From a Clausewitzian perspective, this case study illustrates how a country is thrust into descent when the factors of emotion and passion dominate rationality and control. Unfortunately, the real losers in this situation were Argentina and its people. Perhaps the greatest lesson the *Montonero* example provides is one of caution for governments and societies that may face somewhat similar situations. When a society gives up its core principles and values of governance in the name of greater state security, the society loses.

Notes

1. Microsoft Bookshelf '98 Reference Library.
2. Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron: Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1982), 81-82.
3. For brief but excellent summaries about ALN activities in Brazil, the *Tupamaros* in Uruguay, and the *Montoneros* in Argentina, see Liza Gross, *Handbook of Leftist Guerrilla Groups in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 16-21, 29-32, 145-49.
4. William Columbus Davis, *Warnings From the Far South: Democracy versus Dictatorship in Uruguay, Argentina, and Chile* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1995), 2-3.
5. Gross, 4.
6. Ibid.; *Latin American Insurgencies*, Georges Fauriol, ed. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1985), 9. Fauriol also provides a brief historical overview that concisely traces the development of insurgent groups in Latin America after World War II. See 11-17.
7. Ibid., 163.
8. Gross, 3-4.
9. Ibid., 1.
10. Richard Gillespie, "The Urban Guerrilla in Latin America," *Terrorism, Ideology & Revolution*, Noel O'Sullivan, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1986), 151.
11. Richard Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron: Argentina's Montoneros* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, February 1986), 48. A footnote on page 48 briefly explains *foco* theory. For readers who may be unfamiliar with *focoism*, the note is reproduced here: "The theory of the *foco*, or *foquismo* (subscribed to by *foquistas*), though originally elaborated with rural warfare in mind, contends that revolutionaries should begin to wage armed struggle even if some of the 'conditions' for a successful revolution are not yet present in their country; that guerrilla activities help to create such conditions; and that, by exploiting the classical guerrilla advantages of mobility, flexibility, and surprise, small armed nuclei can develop into popular revolutionary armies, capable of defeating regular armies." See also Regis Debray*, Revolution in the Revolution* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1969); Ernesto Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare: Che Guevara* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1969); and Brian Train, "The Terror War" at <www.islandnet.com/~citizenx/Twbody.html>, 2-3.
12. Fauriol, 168-70; in Martin Edwin Andersen, *Dossier Secreto* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1993), Guevara saw as his mission to make "one, two . . . many Vietnams" in the Americas, 57; Robert Moss, *The War for the Cities* (NY: Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1972), 148.
13. Fauriol, 170-71; Moss, 148.

14. *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, Ian F.W. Beckett and John Pimlott, eds. (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1985), 116; James Kohl and John Litt, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1974), 324; and Davis, 28-29.

15. Walter Laqueur, *The Guerrilla Reader: A Historical Anthology* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1977), 187, and *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, 116.

16. John D. Eliot, "Transitions of Contemporary Terrorism," *Military Review* (May 1977), 9; Train, 4-5; and Kohl and Litt, 18.

17. Eliot, 9.

18. *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, 117, and Kohl and Litt, 19.

19. Ibid., 18.

20. Fauriol, 172.

21. Carlos Marighella, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla*, 1969. No publication data available. Copy in possession of the author.

22. Kohl and Litt, 15-16.

23. Ibid., 15-19, and *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, 123.

24. Kohl and Litt, 20-23.

25. Fauriol, 4, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 60-63.

26. Davis, 74; Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 76; Laqueur, 231.

27. *Armed Forces & Modern Counter-Insurgency*, 116, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 47.

28. Simply stated, "Peronist views" were based on three unifying principles: political sovereignty, economic independence, and social justice. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 8.

29. Davis, 107, and Gross, 7, 14. In addition to the *Montoneros*, the ERP, and the Revolutionary Armed Forces, Gross lists four other "leftist" guerrilla movements prevalent during the 1960s and 1970s: the Guerrilla Army of the People, a Marxist-Leninist-Guevarist group; the Armed Forces of Liberation, a Marxist-Leninist movement with Maoist overtones; the Peronist Armed Forces, a leftist-Peronist group; and the *Uturuncos* "Tiger-Men," a Peronist-Castroist movement, 7-22.

30. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 17, 25, 40, 48; Gross, 17; and Davis, 89, 96.

31. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 1, 57-60, and Gross, 17.

32. For detailed accounts on the Aramburu assassination, see Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 89; Gross, 16; Kohl and Litt, 343; Andersen, 65; and *Terrorism in Argentina*, 1979, no publication data available, 35-38. This book is a compilation of news articles and communiqués published by the military dictatorship that took over Argentina in the late 1970s and conducted the Dirty War. Through brief introductory narratives followed by sensational

newspaper accounts depicting the horrors of guerrilla actions, the book is an attempt to justify the ruling regime's draconian measures to keep order and security. Regarding the Aramburu assassination, pages 35-38 are interviews with some of the *Montonero* members who conducted Operation *PINDAPOY*. Of particular note are the extensive planning, preparations, and methods the guerrillas used in gathering intelligence on Aramburu's movements and details of his apartment along with the ways they obtained military-type uniforms, vehicles, and other support.

33. Kohl and Litt, 324-25, and Davis, 106-107.

34. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 87, 90; Gross, 16-17; and *Latin American Insurgencies*, 26-27.

35. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 84-85. *Commandos* had the following names: Eva Peron, a name that all units eagerly competed for; *Comandante Uturunco*, *nom de guerre* of Argentina's first modern rural guerrilla leader; General Jose de San Martin, after the Independence hero; Felipe Vallese, the first Peronist youth martyr; and 29 May, date of the *Cordobazo*. Later on, *Montonero* units were christened predominately with the names of slain combatants.

36. Ibid., 79.

37. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 95-96, and Davis, 107.

38. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 95-97. Although Gillespie does not specifically state that torture was used to extract information from the two *Montoneros* captured in the La Calera operation, the amount of intelligence gained and the speed with which the police reacted suggests that this was the case. Gillespie does state that after the Maza funeral, public sympathy for the "Montoneros being tortured in prison" became evident.

39. Davis, 107. For a detailed chronology of all the significant guerrilla and government events during Levingston's short term in office, see Kohl and Litt, 343-52.

40. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 111.

41. Davis, 109-11, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 119.

42. Davis, 112-14, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 146-47, 150-51.

43. Davis, 114-16, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 163.

44. Davis, 115-16, and Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 163, 184.

45. Ibid., 174-79.

46. Ibid., 180-81. See also Lester A. Sobel, *Argentina and Peron, 1970-1975,* for additional information on the Born brothers' kidnapping. The specific charges the Born brothers had been "tried" on consisted of exploitation of Argentine workers by Bunge and Born, and the corporation's support to the 1955 military coup that deposed President Peron. "In addition to the $60 million (a figure Bunge & Born neither confirmed nor denied), the

company also distributed $1.2 million worth of food and clothing in poor neighborhoods around the country," 146.

47. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 181.
48. Ibid., 181-82, and Davis, 116-17.
49. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 183-84, 188, and Andersen, 120-21.
50. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 186-92.
51. Ibid., 192.
52. Ibid., 193.
53. Ibid., 193-94.
54. Ibid., 201.
55. Ibid., 196.
56. Ibid., 196-97.
57. Ibid., 197.
58. Ibid., 197-200.
59. Anderson, 232.
60. Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina, 1943-1976, The National Revolution and Resistance* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1976), 178.
61. Hodges, 168-70, and Davis, 117-19.
62. Gillespie, *Soldiers of Peron*, 204-205; Gross, 20-21; Andersen, 12-13.
63. Donald C. Hodges, *Argentina's "Dirty War," An Intellectual Biography* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1991), 19, 177; Patricia and William Marchak*, God's Assassins: State Terrorism in Argentina in the 1970s* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999), preface.
64. Fauriol, 1, 167-68, 191-92.
65. Moss, 240-41.
66. Fauriol, 191.
67. Moss, 240; *Terrorism, Legitimacy, and Power, The Consequences of Political Violence*, Martha Crenshaw, ed. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), 6, 31-35.
68. Gross, 1-2, 5.